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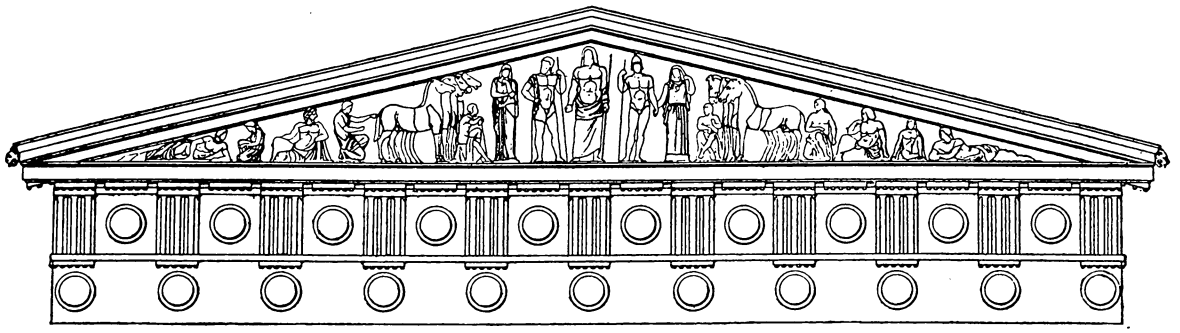


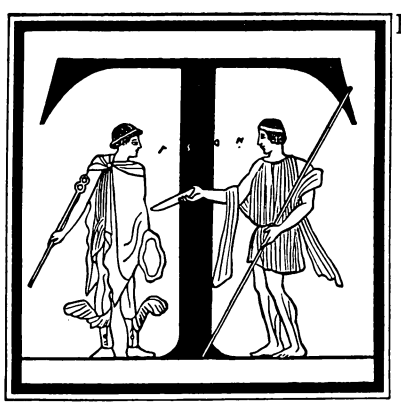
EASTERN PEDIMENT OF THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS, RESTORED.

OLYMPIA

AS IT WAS AND AS IT IS.

"Sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum
Collegisse juvat, metaque fervidis
Evitata rotis, palmaque nobilis
Terrarum dominos evehit ad Deos."

HOR. *Carm.* I. 1. 3–6.



HERMES AND AGON.

THE general interest felt in the excavation of sites famous in ancient history — undertaken by European governments, archæological societies, and private individuals — would seem to show that the nineteenth century has been somewhat unjustly charged with indifference to matters not directly connected with its business or its pleasure, and that it sympathizes with those noble enthusiasms which lead men to sacrifice fortune and comfort for objects whose value is purely æsthetic or historic.

Since the marbles of the Parthenon were placed in the British Museum, every European state has furnished its contingent to the great army of explorers and excavators in classic lands. England has sent forth her Stuart, Chandler, Leake, Penrose, Fellowes, Layard, Smith, Newton, and Wood; France, her Blouet, Texier, Perrier, De Saulcy, Beulé, Lenormant, and her Duc de Luynes; Germany, her Lepsius, Curtius, Schliemann, Hirschfeld, and Adler; Italy, her Fiorelli, Cesnola, Castellani, and Cavalleri; Greece, her Koumanoudhis and Stamatakis, — whose successes, failures, efforts, trials, and triumphs have been made known in every tongue and in every land. The wonderful discoveries at Halikarnassos, Mykenai, Hissarlik, Cyprus, and Ephesus followed quickly upon each other, and in turn absorbed public attention; but for the past four years the eyes of all men have been turned to Olympia, whence month after month has brought news of results such as the most sanguine could not have anticipated. This was in some measure due to the immediate and exceptional success which attended the excavations. Generally speaking, valuable discoveries have been made after long and unrewarded toil, upon which the world has looked with indifference, while the mind of the excavator was alternating between hope and despair. Suddenly, when he is about to relinquish his apparently fruitless task, the workman's spade strikes upon a hard, unyielding mass in the deep trench, whose products have been heretofore but heaps of black earth and broken potsherds. A white gleam as of marble shines out of the pit, and the but now listless watcher, breathless with expectation, is looking for the disentombment of some master-work

of sculpture, upon which genius long ago spent its strength; — statue of god or hero; bas-relief or sarcophagus; vase "with marble braid of men and maidens"; frieze alive with horsemen; Centaurs fighting with Lapiths, or Greeks with Amazons. Like Columbus when land birds began to circle and river grass to float about his ships, the long-baffled excavator regards his special signs of assured hope with a joy heightened by the remembrance of past doubts and anxieties. The excavators at Olympia, however, had no such added cause for rejoicing in their success. It was immediate, and from the first hour no doubt remained that it would be continued.

"It is not," says Aristotle,[1] "the most beautiful or the strongest who are crowned at the Olympic games, but those only who fight in the arena (for among these the victors are to be found); so also in life, those who do good and noble things rightly obtain the prize." At Olympia it has been won by Germany. The marbles which through her well-directed efforts have been restored to us are more enduring trophies than the crowns of wild olive given at the Olympic games; and, like them, do honor not only to the victors, but to the nation which sent them forth to conquer. The enterprise undertaken by the Prussian government in 1875 was urged by the eminent historian and archæologist, Dr. Ernst Curtius, in a lecture on Olympia which he delivered before the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences at Berlin in 1852. In the concluding paragraph he spoke of Winckelmann as having first proposed that search should be made for the treasures of art there buried, and of the French expedition (1829) sixty years after his death, through which a few precious marbles were recovered. Now, he added, that the Alpheios has again buried under its deposits this ground sacred to art, we ask with longing, "When will its bosom be reopened, and the works of the ancients restored to the light of day?" This question was asked twenty-three years after the abandonment of the French enterprise under Abel Blouet, and twenty-three more were to elapse before the questioner was to find himself at Athens, empowered by the Prussian government to obtain for it the exclusive right to excavate at Olympia. The several articles of the ten years' contract which he signed with the Greek authorities on the 28th of April, 1874, provided that operations should be commenced upon the site of the temple of Zeus; that all works of art discovered should belong to Greece, with liberty to retain or dispose of duplicates; that for a period of five years Germany should have the right to take casts from the originals; that accounts of the progress and results of the excavations should be published at Athens in the Greek language and at Greek expense, as at Berlin in the German tongue and at German charge; and that commissioners should be appointed by the contracting parties to see to the carrying out of the stipulations, it being understood that the direction of the works was to be intrusted exclusively to the Germans. Dr. Hirschfeld was then appointed commissioner for Prussia, and Dr. A. Dimitriadis for Greece; an appropriation of over one hundred thousand thalers was made by the German government; the village of Drouva, a cluster of houses situated on a height overlooking the valley of the Alpheios, was selected as the headquarters of the expeditionary force, and there a building suitable for its accommodation was erected, which in August, 1875, was ready for occupation. Early in October, work was begun by the digging of two trenches, one on the east side of the temple, and the other along the west front, between which time and the present, according to Dr. Adler (*Deutsche Bauzeitung*, No. 63, Aug. 9, 1879), there have been found no less than 1328 marble fragments, 7364 bronzes, 696 inscriptions, 2935 coins, 2094 terra-cottas, and 105 objects in glass, horn, tin, etc.

A late German traveller,[2] who resided in the valley for some weeks as the guest of the commissioners, describes it as "wildly romantic," and speaks of the climate as "murderous." "Our brave countrymen," he says, "make a heavy and irreparable sacrifice of their health to science and their fatherland. No one who cares for his life should remain at Olympia more than a year." I have quoted this passage, because it is well for us who profit by the German enterprise to recognize the dangers which it involves, and the risks which are run by those directly engaged in it.

[1] *Nikomacheian Ethics*, Lib. I. p. 8.

[2] *Eine Osterfahrt in den Peloponnesos*. Von Fritz Wernick. Leipzig, 1877.

During the three years which have elapsed since the commencement of the excavations, much has been accomplished, but much yet remains to be done. The broad Olympian plain must be scarred with many another trench before all that still lies buried beneath it is recovered, or those problems which perplex the learned are solved. Until then it will not be possible fully to estimate the results obtained, or to give a complete account of the excavations. To tell what has been found, and to suggest what may be found, is all that can be done at the present time, with any approach to completeness. In this article we propose to give a description of the present condition of Olympia, based on the reports published at Berlin and Athens, and of its former glories, — the temple of Zeus, and the Altis,[1] or sacred grove in which it stood, — and to speak of the Olympic games, their origin, purpose, regulations, and significance, as recorded by Pausanias and other ancient writers.

The prehistoric history of Olympia is embodied in myths, which, apart from their charm as stories, are interesting as containing a residue of truth. Myths are deposits made by the river of time upon the plain of history, which conceal real events, as the deposits of the Alpheios cover the *débris* of ancient buildings and statues. As these lie hidden under the surface of the Olympian plain, and can only be laid bare by turning up the soil with spade and pickaxe, so the "logos," or real meaning of the myth which lies hidden beneath its story, can only be discovered by tracing the analogies between its incidents and historical events, or by literally interpreting the names of those persons who form its *dramatis personæ*. Considering then that "mythology contains the oldest history and the oldest philosophy," we are not to regard myths as mere fables, fit to amuse an idle hour, but as enigmas which, even when we cannot fathom their secrets, are entitled to a certain respect. In this spirit let us read the Olympian myths, among which none is more charming than that of the river Alpheios, which Horace, Virgil, and Ovid have told each in his own way, and Shelley has embalmed in some of the most musical of his ear-haunting verses. Who does not remember how the nymph

"Arethusa arose
From her couch of snows
In the Acroceraunian mountains,
From cloud and from crag,
With many a jag,
Shepherding her bright fountains."

And who does not know how, when surprised and pursued by the river god Alpheios, she fled under the sea to the island of Ortygia, near Syracuse, where Artemis metamorphosed her into a fountain. Thither she was followed by Alpheios bold; "and now," as the English poet sings,

". . . from their fountains
In Enna's mountains,
Down one vale where the morning basks,
Like friends once parted,
Grown single-hearted,
They ply their watery tasks."

The belief in the passage of the river under the sea was supported in Strabo's day by the scarcely more credible story, that a cup thrown into the Alpheios at Olympia would rise in the Ortygian fountain, and that its waters became turbid when oxen were sacrificed at Olympia. The geographer rejected both the fact and the alleged proof, as we should be inclined to do; but Pausanias (V. 7) accepted the first, and considered it to be the origin of the fabled love of the river god for the nymph. In crediting the stories concerning the origin of the Olympic games which were related to him by the priests in Elis, Pausanias stood on firmer ground; for, while these are also largely mythical, they at least prove that agonistic celebrations were held at Olympia, as in all other parts of Greece, long before the first Olympiad, B. C. 776. Kronos ruled over gods and men, and was worshipped at Olympia in a temple built on the site of that

[1] Altis is a dialectic form of ἄλσος, a grove. See Pausanias, V. 10. 1, and Pindar, *Ol.* VIII. 9.

afterwards consecrated to his mightier son Zeus, when Herakles the Idæan Daktyle came from Crete with his four brothers, Penaios, Epimedes, Jason, and Idas, and, by making them run a race upon the plain between the Alpheios and the Kladeos, inaugurated the Olympic games. He gave to the victor a branch of the wild-olive tree which he had brought from the land of the Hyperboreans, and thus fixed the reward of triumph for all time; he instituted, furthermore, the πενταετηρίς, or periodical celebration of the games once in four years, in memory of the number of those who first celebrated them.

The gods themselves are said to have taken part in the games at Olympia, and to have formed the code of laws (agonothesia) by which they were regulated before the flood of Deukalion. About fifty years after it had subsided, Klymenos, a son of Kardys, and the descendant of Herakles, the founder of the games, came from Crete to hold contests in his honor, and dedicated an altar to him under the name of Parastates, the helper. The wild-olive crown was the guerdon of the victors at these games; but in the race run by the sons of Endymion, the prize was the kingdom of Elis, over which their father ruled; and in that between Pelops, founder of the royal house of the Pelopides, and Oinomaos, king of Pisa, it was the hand of his daughter Hippodameia. Pelops, favored by Poseidon, won the race and the prize, and after the defeated king had put an end to his life, joined Olympia to Pisa, and ruled over both. From Pelops the great southern peninsula took its name, — Pelops, whom Pindar (*Ol.* I. 1–7) ranks among national heroes "as the Olympic Agon among national festivals; as the Sun among the planets; as gold among precious metals; and as water among the elements."

Names scarcely less famous than that of Pelops in the mythic annals of Greece follow his in the list of prehistoric victors at Olympia. Among them are those of Peleus, the father of Achilleus; Neleus, the son of Poseidon; Herakles, the Greek demigod who superintended the games and intrusted them to the Dioskouroi after his apotheosis; Iolaos, his friend and charioteer; and Ophilos or Oxylos, who established an Ætolian colony in the territory of Elis. The name of this last hero of the prehistoric period represents an Ætolian element, as that of Herakles does a Dorian, and that of Pelops an Achaian. The three elements united in worshipping the Pelasgic Zeus, whom the original inhabitants of the country had reverenced as an embodiment of the powers of nature, and as the original possessor of the soil. They also jointly paid due honors to Pelops, although he represented the Achaian race of which the Herakleidai were the bitter enemies; and made offerings to Herakles, who, as the representative of the Dorian invaders of the Peloponnesos, had been, in truth, regarded as a foe by the Eleans.

An almost blank period of more than three centuries lies between the time of Oxylos and that of his descendant Iphitos, with whom the real history of the Olympic games begins. Civil strife, war, and pestilence had long caused their discontinuance, when in the eighth century before Christ, Iphitos consulted the Delphic oracle, as to how the evils which afflicted the land could be made to cease, and was told, by the re-establishment of the festivals at Olympia. Assisted by the great Spartan lawgiver Lykourgos, and by Kleisthenes of Pisa, he accomplished this important duty with great wisdom and foresight, giving the games a national instead of a local character by the institution of an armistice during the sacred month set apart for their celebration. They thus became a strong bond of union between the politically divided peoples of Hellas. While the truce lasted, harmony prevailed, and Elis, as sacred to the Olympian Zeus, was secure from invasion. Soldiers entering the Elean territory were obliged to lay down their arms, and neither individuals nor states were allowed to participate in the games until they had paid the heavy fines consequent upon a violation of the peace. The approaching celebration was proclaimed by heralds in every part of Greece, and the people were thus called to a "panegyris," or universal gathering, into which all the states, represented by their most eminent citizens, entered, not as Athenians, Ætolians, or Spartans, but as Hellenes. Well might the disc of Iphitos, upon which the text of the truce which he established was inscribed,[1] be preserved

[1] This disc was not, however, inscribed at the time, as letters were not introduced into Greece till at least a century later.

as a sacred relic in the temple of Zeus, and deservedly did his statue find place there, for, by instituting the truce, he rendered the periodical celebration of the great festival possible. To the Greeks this was even a greater service than it at first sight appears, for not only were the Olympic, the Pythian, and the Nemean games the promoters of a Panhellenic feeling, but they developed in many other ways all that was best and noblest in the Greek character.[1]

The ethical advantages arising from the Panhellenic festivals were equalled by those of an æsthetic nature. The vast multitudes who attended them had the nude constantly before their eyes in every variety of action. Accustomed to the sight of the most perfectly developed specimens of physical beauty, they became intelligent critics of art, and raised the general standard of requirement. Having learned to appreciate perfect form in nature, they became intolerant of imperfect form in marble, and demanded that the statue of the swift-footed athlete should do him ample justice. This the great Greek artists learned to do, by observation of the living body, and not, like those of modern times, by studying the relaxed tendons and flaccid muscles of a corpse. Signs of progress in sculpture appear in the fiftieth Olympiad, when nude wrestlers, runners, and pugilists first contended in the arena. When, in the fifty-eighth Olympiad (B. C. 544), the custom was introduced of dedicating the εἰκόνες, or images, of victors in the Altis, sculptors were obliged to study their subjects with the utmost care, since accurate resemblance to all parts of the body was demanded.

Absorbed in the endeavor to reproduce every detail of its surface, the earlier sculptors failed to realize an harmonious whole; but in the effort they gained those habits of close observation whose wonderful results are the Æginetan marbles, and laid that solid basis of knowledge upon which the ideal school of Pheidias was to be raised. It must not be supposed that the sculptors of the first iconic statues attempted to represent the athletes in action. On the contrary, they made them stand still, that they might copy their limbs in repose as closely as possible; but from this timid course their successors more and more departed as their skill increased, until the day when a Myron could make the "breathing" image of a Ladas which seemed "about to spring from the pedestal on which it stood."[2] The regular celebration of those great festivals, in which gymnastic exercises played so important a part, was a matter of such importance in Greek eyes, that, even when Xerxes and his host were advancing into the heart of Hellas, and the freedom and very existence of the nation were at stake, the Greeks could not bring themselves to postpone the Olympic games beyond the appointed time. That they should have been persisted in at this crisis seems incredible; but we must remember that to neglect such a means of propitiating Zeus in the hour of danger would have been unwise; that Thermopylai was far from Olympia, and that armed Attica stood between it and the Persians; and, above all, that the Greeks regarded gymnastic exercises in a very different light from that in which they appear to us. Their use or disuse involved a question of duty to the gods, as well as to themselves; for to the Greeks the perfectly developed human form was the noblest of all objects. It was the visible link between them and the gods, and as anthropomorphism increased, and art was perfected, it became more and more the express image of the godlike. In the Olympic games the Greeks recognized an institution of divine origin, and thought that to take part in them was "an act of piety towards their deified founder and the local deity. It was to tread in the steps of divine and heroic ancestors, and to show that their lofty ambitions still survived in the breasts of their descendants. Thus all the memories and associations of religion and antiquity were gathered into a focus at Olympia."[3]

CHARLES C. PERKINS.

[1] The moral and social advantages of the great games are set forth by Dionys. Halik., *Techn. Rhet.*, Ch. I. and VII., and by Isokrates, *Paneg.* 44.

[2] Ἔμπνοε Λάδα, *Anth. Gr.*, IV. Ladas the Lakonian, who surpassed all his contemporaries in swiftness, died in the act of winning the prize at Olympia. Paus., III. 21. 1.

[3] *Pindar*, by Rev. F. D. Morice.

(*To be continued.*)